

First records of Mottled Swift *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* and Alpine Swift *T. melba* for Niger

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Premières mentions pour le Niger du Martinet marbré *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* et du Martinet alpin *T. melba*. Les auteurs documentent la découverte de deux espèces nouvelles pour le Niger. Un Martinet marbré *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* a été observé dans un groupe mixte de martinets près du Grand Hôtel à Niamey, le 27 août 2004. Six Martinets alpins *T. melba* ont été vus en compagnie de 14 Martinets noirs *Apus apus* à environ 65 km à l'ouest de Zinder (13°69'N 09°57'E), le 31 août 2004.

In 2004 we made bird observations in Niger as part of the Project Régional de Lutte Intégrée contre les Sauteriaux au Sahel (PRÉLISS), which was initiated in 2002 and funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). During this project intensive ornithological research was conducted and in 2003 four species that were new to Niger were recorded (Christensen *et al.* 2005). We report two other additions to the country's avifauna, recorded during the survey in 2004.

Mottled Swift

On 27 August 2004, at 08.30 hrs, a large dark swift with a paler belly was discovered in a mixed flock of Common Swifts *Apus apus*, Little Swifts *A. affinis* and African Palm Swifts *Cypsiurus parvus* near the Grand Hôtel, Niamey (zone 2 in Giraudoux *et al.* 1988). It was observed for c.10 minutes until the flock disappeared to the other side of the river. A few minutes later the large swift returned with the flock and flew above us for another five minutes. It was clearly larger than the other species in the flock and its wingbeats were noticeably slower. We estimated that its wingspan was c.30% larger than that of the Common Swifts. The plumage was dark brown overall, but the belly was mottled paler brown to grey and the throat was grey. The tail was forked. These are diagnostic features of Mottled Swift *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* (Borrow & Demey 2001). The only other swift of that size is Alpine Swift *T. melba*, which has a white belly and throat, and is well known to us.

The distribution of Mottled Swift in West Africa is patchy and inadequately known. It has

been recorded from Guinea to eastern Chad and north-east Central African Republic (Fry *et al.* 1988, Borrow & Demey 2001). The nearest records are c.400 km to the north-west in Mali and c.500 km to the west in Burkina Faso (Balança & de Visscher 1993, Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 2005), only a short distance for a large swift. This is the first documented record of Mottled Swift for Niger: the species is not included in Dowsett's (1993) checklist for the country and is not mapped for Niger in Borrow & Demey (2001).

Alpine Swift

On 31 August 2004, at 07.30 hrs, a flock of swifts, containing 14 Common Swifts and six Alpine Swifts, was found c. 65 km west of Zinder in western Niger (13°69'N 09°57'E, zone 3 in Giraudoux *et al.* 1988). The birds were foraging fairly low at 15–20 m above the ground in excellent light, making viewing conditions ideal. They were observed for ten minutes before they disappeared to the south. The Alpine Swifts were c.20% larger than the Common Swifts and had distinctively slower wingbeats. The upperparts were uniformly brown and contrasted with the pure white belly and throat, which were separated by a dark brownish breast-band. The dark brownish tail was shallowly forked. The underwing-coverts appeared brownish with slightly paler flight-feathers. Mottled Swift, the only other large swift in Africa, has very differently coloured and patterned underparts.

Alpine Swift is a Palearctic passage migrant and winter visitor to West Africa, from Mauritania to Liberia east to Cameroon, with large flocks being frequently recorded in Ghana, Togo and

Nigeria (Fry *et al.* 1988, Borrow & Demey 2001). Although it has been reported to breed on the Bandiagara escarpment, central Mali, where common (Thiollay 1974), this has recently been questioned by Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire (2005). The observed birds are most likely Palearctic visitors from north-west Africa or Europe. Migration through the southern Palearctic occurs mainly in September–October, though there is some southward movement in August by juveniles at least (Cramp 1985). In Mali, birds are said to arrive in September–October (Lamarche 1980). This appears to be the first documented record of Alpine Swift for Niger. Although Fry *et al.* (1988) mention records of 2–200 Alpine Swifts in Niger and Nigeria, we have not been able to track the origin of these records and the species is not included in Dowsett's (1993) checklist for the country, nor is it mapped or mentioned for Niger in Borrow & Demey (2001).

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